

Sparks 2015: A View from the Chair



*Marta Costas, director of **Grantfair**, chaired this year's Sparks conference. Since it began in 2010, Sparks has become the largest student-run entrepreneurship conference in the UK, attracting founders, business leaders and CEOs to speak to over 450 student entrepreneur attendees. Here, she recaps on a interesting weekend and tells us what made this year's conference successful. Find out more at sparkslse.com*

This year's Sparks conference brought entrepreneurship back to basics. Inspiration, turns out, is not the main catalyst of entrepreneurial success. It's the daily habits that make a difference. The smallest of changes to our daily routines can make a lasting impact (**Eric Partaker, Chilango**).

The discourse was refreshing. Today's economy is often too focused on ideas rather than processes, obsessed with digital startups that provide hockey-stick growth potential and lean-startup methodologies (**Andrew Garner, Boyden World Corporation**). While viral success might be the holy grail for technology startups, most sectors still rely on gradual growth to achieve long-term success. For most businesses it's the small processes, not the big ideas, that matter.

Learning to connect the dots to see the bigger picture is the hardest challenge. For many of the speakers, success didn't arrive early (**Levi Roots, Reggae Reggae Sauce**), or through the path expected (**John Griffin, Addison Lee**). It came only after several years in the corporate world or after trying and failing to grow earlier ventures (**Kaushal Dugar, Teabox**). Often, those early failures and hurdles help to consolidate the vision that ultimately led them to succeed, discarding unnecessary goals and temporary distractions. Plans change, but a mental compass is essential to move in the right direction (**Kelsey Ramsden, Serial Entrepreneur**).



Levi Roots speaks at Sparks 2015, with chair Marta Costas to the right. Picture credit: Eternal Memories Photography

A big part of entrepreneurial success relies on having the right skills and networks. A few years of corporate experience, whilst frustrating, can help consolidate good habits and strength of character (**David Buttress, Just Eat**). Building a profitable company with a reliable brand takes years of effort, frustration and challenges (**Steven Smith, Poundland**). Having the maturity to accept the bad with the good, power through self-doubt and hold up when things turn difficult is part of what makes entrepreneurship such a rewarding experience (**Rami Ranger, Sun Mark Ltd**).

By bringing something for everyone, Sparks's biggest achievement was to make entrepreneurship relatable. In a decade hijacked by hipster-cool fun, it almost seemed startup stardom was the only route to success (**Gerald Horhan, The Investment Punk**). Sparks 2015 reminded us of what entrepreneurship is really about: doing things your own way.

Marta Costas is Director of [Grantfair](#), helping people with great ideas get funding via government grants. Marta has a decade of experience helping companies in the Technology, Media and Telecoms (TMT) sector connect with public sector organisations, navigating complex regulatory structures, raising funding for innovative projects and helping to shape public policy. Marta has been an active member of the Alumni Association since 2011 and is currently Chair of LEAG, the LSE Entrepreneur-Alumni Group. Marta graduated from LSE with an MSc in European Social Policy in 2007.

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